

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5146

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

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E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PO, AS

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN PRESS AND PARLIAMENT CONTINUE TO DIS-
CUSS SITUATION IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR

REF: CANBERRA 1212

1. SUMMARY: AUSTRALIAN PRESS COVERAGE AND EDITORIAL OPINIONS ON REPORTED INDONESIAN CONSIDERATION OF USE OF FORCE IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR CONTINUE TO BE UNUSUALLY DETAILED. EDITORIAL OPINION ON POSSIBLE USE OF FORCE HAS BEEN HIGHLY NEGATIVE, AS WAS TONE OF DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT FEB 25. OPPOSITION MOTION VIEWED WITH ALARM WHAT IT TERMED LABOR GOVERNMENT'S EQUIVOCAL ATTITUDE ON FUTURE OF EAST TIMOR. DEBATE BROUGHT OUT FACT THAT FRETELIN AND UDT PARTIES IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR HAD SENT TELEGRAM TO AUSTRALIAN OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS FEB 24, CALLING FOR AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE OF EAST TIMOR. END SUMMARY.

2. AUSTRALIAN PRESS CONTINUES TO PROVIDE UNUSUALLY DETAILED COVERAGE OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING PORTUGUESE TIMOR. DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT FEB 25 FURTHER UNDER-
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LINED AUSTRALIAN INTEREST IN MATTER.

3. SYDNEY MORNING HERALD FEB 26 CARRIED EDITORIAL NOTING INDICATIONS THAT INDONESIA IS CONSIDERING MILITARY TAKE-OVER OF PORTUGUESE TIMOR. EDITORIAL COMMENTED THAT INDONESIA QTE SHOULD BE LEFT IN NO DOUBT THAT IT WOULD DO ITSELF GREAT HARM BY TRYING TO SOLVE AN ADMITTEDLY DIFFICULT PROBLEM BY CRUDE FORCE...PRESIDENT SOEHARTO SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO DELUDE HIMSELF THAT HE CAN REPEAT IN TIMOR PRESIDENT SUKARNO'S COUP IN NEW GUINEA WITHOUT INCURRING GRAVE RISKS. END QTE

4. AUSTRALIAN EDITORIAL OF FEB 26 DISCUSSES INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR IN CONSIDERABLE DETAIL, NOTING PROS AND CONS OF THREE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF CONTINUED ASSOCIATION WITH PORTUGAL, INDEPENDENCE, AND INTEGRATION INTO INDONESIA. EDITORIAL CONTINUES, QTE OBVIOUSLY, THE (AUSTRALIAN) GOVERNMENT SHOULD TRY FIRST TO WARN INDONESIA OF THE DANGERS OF THE MILITARY OPTION, AND, SECOND, TO SEEK A ROLE IN ENSURING THAT THE TIMOR ELECTIONS ARE HELD WITHOUT COERCION. END QTE.

5. IN PARLIAMENT FEB 25 OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ANDREW PEACOCK, INITIATED DEBATE ON OPPOSITION MOTION CONCERNING QTE THE GOVERNMENT'S EQUIVOCAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF EAST TIMOR AND ITS FAILURE TO TAKE URGENT ACTION TO ENSURE A SOLUTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WISHES OF THE EAST TIMORESE PEOPLE AND IN THE INTERESTS OF THE REGION. END QTE. NATURALLY, IN THE PRESENT HEATED POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN AUSTRALIA, MOTION, COINED IN SUCH TENDENTIOUS TERMS, PROVOKED A TYPICALLY SNARLING DEBATE, WITH OPPOSITION VIEWING WITH ALARM LABOR GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGED ENCOURAGEMENT TO INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT TO TAKE OVER PORTUGUESE TIMOR, WHILE GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN (MHR WILLIAM MORRISON SPOKE FOR PRIME MINISTER) DEFENDED EFFORTS OF GOVERNMENT TO PROMOTE DISCUSSION AND NEGOTIATED SOLUTION OF PROBLEM.

6. DEBATE CONCLUDED WITHOUT TRACING ANY NEW GROUND AND WITHOUT VOTE DUE TO EXPIRATION OF TIME. DURING DEBATE PEACOCK STATED THAT AFTERNOON OF FEB 24 HE RECEIVED TELEGRAM FROM FRETELIN AND UDT PARTIES IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TEXT OF WHICH AS FOLLOWS: QTE COALITION FRETELIN UDT HOLDING OVER 95 PERCENT TIMOR'S POPULATION CALL YOUR SUPPORT INDEPENDENCE EAST TIMOR. AUSTRALIA HAS GREAT RESPONSIBILITY MAINTENANCE PEACE THIS GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, THUS TO PREVENT ANY CONFLICT, REAL WILL TIMORESE PEOPLE MUST BE RESPECTED. COALITION IS PREPARED START TALKS AUSTRALIAN, INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT FOR COOPERATION TOWARDS PEACE, POLITICAL STABILITY SEA (SIC; PRESUMABLY, LAST WORD IS TYPO FOR AREA) END QTE

7. DFA(IAN NICHOLSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, INFORMATION BRANCH)
TOLD EMBOFF FEB 25 THAT ALAN TAYLOR, CHIEF OF POLITICAL SECTION IN AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY, JAKARTA, HAS TRAVELLED TO PORTUGUESE TIMOR OVER PAST WEEKEND TO REPORT ON SITUATION. TRIP LONG PLANNED AND WILL BE FIRST OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN VISIT TO TERRITORY SINCE MID-1974.

8. COMMENT: SIGNIFICANCE OF EXTENDED TREATMENT AND EDITORIAL COMMENT IN AUSTRALIA, TOGETHER WITH PARTISAN DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT FEB 25, IS THAT EVENTS IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR WILL BE WATCHED CLOSELY BY AUSTRALIAN PRESS, GOVERNMENT, AND OPPOSITION. EVEN IF GOA WOULD PREFER INDONESIAN TAKEOVER OF TERRITORY IN LONG TERM, INDONESIAN USE OF FORCE WOULD MAKE HIGHLY NEGATIVE IMPRESSION IN AUSTRALIA, AS GOA HAS ALWAYS ANTICIPATED IT WOULD SINCE PROBLEM OF DISPOSITION OF PORTUGUESE TIMOR RAISED IN MID-1974. GOA IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD HAVE TO MAKE STRONG REPRESENTATIONS TO INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT, WITH PROBABLE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES UNFAVORABLE FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIAN-INDONESIAN RELATIONS. AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO INDONESIA, R.A. WOOLCOTT WAS SCHEDULED TO LEAVE FOR JAKARTA AROUND MARCH 10. DEPARTURE HAS NOW BEEN ADVANCED TO END OF THIS WEEK OR EARLY NEXT WEEK, WITH DISCUSSION OF INDONESIAN POLICY ON PORTUGUESE TIMOR CLEARLY HIS FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS.
HARROP

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